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SUBJECT: CODEL LANGEVIN DISCUSSES SECURITY AND ELECTIONS
WITH CONFIDENT KARZAI

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Codel Langevin (Rep. James Langevin, Rep. Mike Coffman, Rep. Tom Rooney, Rep. Kilili Sablan) met with a relaxed, confident President Karzai May 30 to discuss Afghanistan's greatest challenges - insecurity and weak governance, as well as Karzai's plans for the country's future. Karzai was confident of re-election and stressed the need for continued U.S. assistance to achieve a more secure, sustainable Afghanistan. He pledged to strengthen his focus on capacity building and anti-corruption efforts if re-elected, and contended reconciliation was both feasible and desirable to promote stability.

FIGHT AGAINST TERROR STILL TOP PRIORITY

¶2. (SBU) Karzai agreed that Afghanistan and the U.S. must continue to focus on the fight against terrorism. Karzai was increasingly worried about the impact Pakistan's growing instability - especially in the border areas - was having on Afghanistan's own security. Afghanistan continued to seek improved security cooperation with Pakistan. Karzai thought assistance from countries from the Arab world and the "world of Islam" (especially Saudi Arabia) was necessary to successfully address the insurgent threat in Pakistan. The Ambassador noted that President Obama would deliver a speech in Cairo this week addressing broader global issues and the Muslim world.

KARZAI'S OUTLINES DESIRED LEGACY

¶3. (SBU) Whatever the outcome of the upcoming elections, Karzai stressed the Afghan people must see the election process as fair and transparent. This, he said, would be a key step in the institutionalization of democracy in Afghanistan. The Codel asked how Karzai saw his legacy in five years if he were re-elected. The Representatives pointed to some good ministers working to strengthen their institutions, especially the Ministers of Interior, Defense and Finance, and asked if Karzai intended to retain these officials if re-elected. Karzai assured the Codel he intended to continue forward with his most effective ministers.

¶4. (SBU) If elected to another term, Karzai hoped 2014 would see a more united Afghanistan in which its people did not live in fear, either from militants or their own officials. A more democratic, economically sound Afghanistan that offered its children a brighter future, took its place as an equal among nations, and lived at peace both within its own borders and with its neighbors, and an Afghanistan that still counted the U.S. as a strong ally.

GOVERNANCE AND SECURITY CHALLENGES

¶5. (SBU) Responding to the Codel's concerns regarding governance and security problems, Karzai acknowledged there were still many problems but added his government had

accomplished much in recent years. He pointed to education and health as areas where Afghanistan had made great strides - from primary schools to universities, thousands more students were participating in the education system each year. And the spread of health clinics and practitioners to more remote parts of the country was directly improving quality of life for the Afghan people.

¶6. (SBU) Counterterrorism remained at the top of the list of Afghanistan's concerns, but close behind, Karzai said, was the lack of governance capacity. Below the most senior levels, administrative and governmental capacity remained extremely weak. If re-elected, he planned to focus more closely on ways to bridge this gap and praised India's model of civil service training and administration. Karzai wanted to develop programs to build up Afghanistan's civil service similar to those programs already being implemented to reform and strengthen the army, police and judiciary. In the absence of significant improvements in governance, Karzai asserted that Afghanistan would be a long-term burden for the U.S. and the international community. U.S. and international support to build this administrative capacity was critical.

¶7. (SBU) Regarding the Codel's inquiry on his efforts to combat corruption and strengthen rule of law, Karzai noted Afghanistan's judicial structures had been virtually destroyed after 30 years of war. The judiciary needed more technical assistance and educated judges and lawyers. Karzai agreed widespread corruption was a problem, but asserted that it went beyond government and represented a societal challenge as well. He noted the government sometimes struggled to hold a local official or community leader

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accountable for misconduct because the community would often band together out of loyalty and pressure the government to drop its efforts, even knowing the individual was guilty of wrongdoing.

KARZAI OPTIMISTIC ON RE-ELECTION

¶8. (SBU) Karzai was cautiously optimistic regarding his re-election prospects. He related that earlier in the day, he had struck deals with leaders of the Hazara and Uzbek political contingents (Haji Mohammed Mohaqqueq and Sayed Noorullah, respectively). Karzai noted the leaders had attached surprisingly few conditions in offering to throw their support to Karzai. According to the President, both Mohaqqueq and Noorullah said their communities were satisfied with Karzai's representation of ethnic minorities and saw him as a unity candidate.

¶9. (SBU) The President claimed the overall political system was weakened by having too many marginal presidential candidates. Many had joined the race only to see what deals could be made when the major candidates sought to consolidate support. This "dealmaking" diminished the process in the eyes of the public. (Note: An ironic observation coming from the candidate making most of the deals thus far.) The Codel asked if development of stronger political parties would not go far in addressing this concern. Karzai agreed, saying he favored the U.S. system of two strong parties instead of "30 small squabbling parties." (Note: Karzai has consistently opposed development of strong Afghan political parties in favor of the more traditional system of personal patronage and informal, shifting political alliances - the system that enabled him to strike the deals with Mohaqqueq and Noorullah.)

RECONCILIATION

¶10. (SBU) The Codel asked about the prospects for reconciliation. Karzai affirmed reconciliation remained an attainable, desirable goal to heal rifts within Afghanistan. Only those with ties to al-Qaeda or foreign intelligence

services were outside the circle of potential reconcilables. Karzai maintained most local taliban fighters were poor, uneducated people who could be convinced to lay down arms and accept Afghanistan's constitution. Karzai hoped for continued support from partners like the U.S. and Saudi Arabia in moving reconciliation forward, however incrementally. One ongoing problem in securing the support of at-risk communities was civilian casualties. Karzai recognized the U.S. suffered losses - along with Afghan forces - in fighting the enemy and that Coalition Forces continually sought to avoid civilian losses. Nonetheless, it was a profoundly sensitive issue for the Afghan people and one that was used as an effective wedge by those hard-core militants who opposed reconciliation.

POPPY STILL A PROBLEM

11. (SBU) The Codel asked about Karzai's counternarcotics efforts, noting that 93 percent of the world's opium still came from Afghan poppy. Karzai pointed out that the vast majority of that poppy originated in Helmand province in areas outside government control. He pointed to the dramatic decline of poppy cultivation in other parts of Afghanistan, saying that in areas where security and some level of governance were present, poppy declined or disappeared, adding that where there is little security there is "much poppy" and where there is no security there is a "lot of poppy." Karzai also criticized earlier poor coordination of counternarcotics efforts by the international community and the UN with the Afghan government, but noted coordination had improved markedly over the past year.

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